Establishing the Measurement Variables of the Chinese Hotel Guest Experience in Malaysia

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The growth of the world's tourism industry has developed the hotel industry, and the continuous growth of Chinese outbound tourists has brought opportunities to the Malaysian hotel industry. However, attracting more Chinese outbound tourists to hotels and retaining customers has become a problem for Malaysian hotels, as guests' experience highly depends on their evaluation of their visit. The experience is reflected in their evaluation of numerous variables. However, the literature indicates no single, agreed framework to measure hotel visit experience. Hence, this paper evaluates the scale that can measure hotel visit experience. It uses Chinese guests as respondents. To do so, a model consisting of perceived value, satisfaction and commitment on electronic word-of-mouth responses is proposed. Using the pilot research method, the empirical data came from Chinese hotel guests visiting Malaysia hotels, using a survey questionnaire. The study used quantitative approach and Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21, utilized for data analysis procedures. This paper has vital significance and purpose, as it fills gaps in the literature on hotel management research.

Key words: *Perceived Value, Overall Satisfaction, Electronic word-of-mouth responses, Chinese Hotel Guests, Malaysia.*

Introduction

The development of tourism has driven the development of destinations in many countries and the continuous expansion of the hotel industry. The World Tourism Organization (2018) pointed out that the total number of international tourists in 2017 increased by 3-4% compared with 2016, among which Asian tourists became the largest growth group, reaching 5-6%. The increase of international tourists has brought more foreign exchange earnings and employment opportunities.

Chinese outbound tourism is growing tremendously. Thus, it has enormous potential for further development. Lin, Liu and Song (2015) predicted that the number of Chinese outbound tourists will reach 138.7 million by 2020. With the increased number of Chinese outbound tourists, their days per visit and visit frequency have also increased. The growth of these data reflects the fact that hotel (accommodation) has become one of their important needs when visiting destinations. Hence, it is logical that Chinese outbound tourists will bring performance and beneficial effects to the hotel industry. Therefore, it is sufficient to say that the development of the hotel industry also positively impacts the global and local economy.

Malaysia has the advantage of attracting Chinese outbound tourists. The Malaysian government has made efforts to attract them. Malaysia has geographical advantages, cultural advantages, island resource advantages and exchange rate advantages to attract them. In addition, the Malaysian government has also adjusted the visa policy and exposure of Malaysia in the travel platform of China. Therefore, Chinese outbound tourists are an important part of Malaysia's inbound tourism. Attracting more Chinese outbound tourists to Malaysia is bound to help its tourism industry.

Numerous researchers have pointed out that traditional word-of-mouth (WOM) has a huge impact on consumer purchase decision-making (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Halstead, Hartman, & Schmidt, 1994; Kim & Kim, 2017). However, with the continuous development of science and technology, traditional WOM is gradually being replaced by electronic word-of-mouth (Buhalis & Law, 2008). At the same time, e-WOM has a faster communication speed, wider communication range and anonymity of communication information (Schindler & Bickart, 2005), which have a stronger effect on consumers making new purchase decisions than traditional WOM (King, Racherla, & Bush, 2014). However, several studies measured guest satisfaction using other component. They include hospitality service performance and emotional responses (Patwary & Rashid, 2016), the "multisensory" experience of sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch (Liao, 2018), accuracy, cleanliness, location, communication, check-in, and value with various motivations, preferences and behaviours of Chinese tourists (Zhang, Wang, & Cheng, 2020). Due to contradiction with previous constructs in measuring Chinese tourists' satisfaction, this study intends to investigate these components/variables using Chinese guests as respondents. It focusses on the Chinese outbound tourists when they finished their hotel experience in Malaysia; specifically, the influence of perceived value, satisfaction and commitment on e-WOM responses of Chinese hotel guests in Malaysia.

Literature Review and Theoretical Background

The development in this study of a theoretical framework can enrich the literature on hotel industry related variables (perceived value, satisfaction, commitment, e-WOM response). Although many studies have considered some of these variables (Hu, Kandampully, &

Juwaheer, 2009; Keiningham, Ball, Benoit, Bruce, Buoye, Dzenkovska, & Zaki, 2017; Jeong & Jang, 2011; Patwary, Mohammed, Hazbar, & Kamal, 2018), few have considered the hotel experience of Chinese tourists and their e-WOM responses. This study will enrich the literature on these topics and fill in research gaps.

Perceived Value

This research explores the relationship between the perceived value and satisfaction, perceived value and commitment, and perceived value and e-WOM responses. Perceived value is the customer's evaluation of the utility of the products or services provided. It should be noted that perceived value is often used to evaluate the customer's comprehensive experience in hotels (Ryu, Lee, & Gon Kim, 2012; Guterman, 2015), while perceived value also involves some form of psychological process (Urbinati, Bogers, & Frattini, 2019).

The dimension of perceived value is generally divided into a one-dimensional construct (Zeithaml, 1988) and a multi-dimensional construct (Petrick, 2002). The one-dimensional view holds that the perceived value of customers can be explained by a single dimension (monetary value). However, some scholars have proposed that using a single dimension to explain perceived value imposes great limitations (Raza, Siddiquei, Awan & Bukhari, 2012). For example, Petrick (2004) confirmed the reliability and validity of multi-dimensional perceived value. Therefore, this study will adopt a multi-dimensional measurement method. The perceived value has been divided into four aspects which are financial value, functional value, emotional value and aesthetic value; the variables adopted from previous studies of Sweeney and Soutar, (2001); Petrick, (2004) and Mohsin and Lockyer (2010).

Satisfaction

Expectations often appear in relevant articles on satisfaction (Grönroos, 1983). Schiffman and Kanuk (2004) for example defined satisfaction as the comparison between the customer's perception of the product and the customer's initial expectations. Specifically, the customer is satisfied when the customer's perceived consumption experience exceeds or equals the customer's initial expectations. For the customer's perceived consumption experience to be less than the customer's initial expectations, will often result in dissatisfaction. However, in some industries, the role of expectation in the assessment process of satisfaction is controversial. A number of researchers point out that the generation of expectations is conditional (Yüksel & Rimmington, 1998; Fuchs & Weiermair, 2003). They believe that expectations arise from the customer's knowledge or experience of a certain degree of pre-consumption of products and services; otherwise expectations cannot be formed. Thus, Kozak (2002) suggested expectation variables should be less used for satisfaction assessment in the service industry. As a typical service industry, guests of a hotel may lack relevant

experience and pre-knowledge, as in the case of Chinese outbound tourists who travel abroad for the first time. Therefore, this study presumes that expectation is not significant in the process of assessing satisfaction.

There are many ways to measure customer satisfaction, generally divided into four kinds. Firstly, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) suggested that both unsatisfactory results and satisfactory results should be considered when measuring customer satisfaction. Secondly, Gronroos (1990) proposed that customer satisfaction should be measured by the product performance satisfaction level perceived by consumers. Thirdly, Chi and Qu (2008) proposed that the overall satisfaction level and the multiple performance satisfaction level (including multiple performance of products, services and equipment) should be considered when measuring tourism satisfaction. However, due to operational difficulties, only a handful of research has used multi-performance structure to measure satisfaction in practice. Finally, in the hotel industry, Heung (2000) suggested using overall satisfaction to measure hotel guests' satisfaction. This study focuses on the positive aspects of all variables. Meanwhile, it is difficult to predict whether hotel guests use the hotel products, services and facilities or not. Therefore, this study uses overall satisfaction to measure hotel guests' satisfaction, an adaption from Alegre and Cladera, (2006) and Kozak (2002).

Commitment

In addition to perceived value and satisfaction, commitment also plays a significant role in influencing hotel guests' e-WOM response. Past studies identified commitment as a lasting and important relationship with customers (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Berry & Parasuraman, 2004; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, & Gremler, 2002). In the service industry, to maintain and enhance the commitment of customers as trading partners, operators are willing to make short-term sacrifices for long-term benefits, which reflects the importance of commitment in the service industry (Berry & Parasuraman, 2004).

Regarding the components of the commitment, different researchers have proposed different measurement structures. Some researchers have suggested that the measurement of commitment should at least include affective commitment and continuance commitment (Fullerton, 2003; Harrison-Walker, 2001). However, Mattila (2006) proposed a one-dimensional structure that uses affective commitment to measure commitment. Affective commitments are better aligned with the definition of customer commitment. That is, affective commitment can be used to measure customer commitment. At the same time, Fullerton (2005) pointed out that affective commitment and continuance commitment interact. Moreover, as there is fierce competition in the hotel industry, the hotel operator provides hotel guests with a wide range of hotel products. Hotel guests have more choices, so it is inappropriate to choose continuance commitment when measuring hotel guests'

commitment. Therefore, this study chooses affective commitment to measure hotel guests' commitment, by adopting from Shemwell, Cronin, and Bullard (1994).

E-WOM Responses

Goldsmith (2008) defined e-WOM as all informal communication through web technologies or electronic media that may arise between consumers or between producers and consumers. With the continuous development of e-WOM, consumers can share and express their ideas about products and services on various electronic or online media (Schindler & Bickart, 2005). These ideas can be shared anonymously or by real names (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008). Consumers can search for more extensive information without spending too much effort (Athanasopoulou, 2008). These characteristics make e-WOM gradually replace traditional WOM, with the attention of more researchers.

E-WOM plays an important role in consumers' new purchase decisions, especially in the hotel industry, where its impact is likely to be greater (King et al., 2014). Some researchers believed it greatly influences the hotel industry (Pourabedin & Migin, 2015; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), and that it has a huge impact on the future behaviour of hotel guests (Wang, 2015). For example, potential customers will consider sharing their evaluation with other guests when they choose a hotel (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010), and positive e-WOM has a positive impact on potential hotel guests.

For Chinese consumers, e-WOM has a significant impact on consumer decision-making. Fong and Burton (2008) compare Chinese and American consumers' responses to el-WOM. They found that Chinese consumers are more active than American consumers in seeking relevant information from electronic media and social networks. Chinese consumers' future behaviour is more susceptible to e-WOM (Fong & Burton, 2008), and this view was confirmed by Lien, Cao and Zhou (2017). Therefore, the researchers chose Chinese hotel guests in Malaysia as a representative and scientific sample.

According to the very definition of WOM and e-WOM, their biggest difference lies in the difference of physical communication media. However, the path of influence on customer behaviour is basically unchanged. Therefore, this study bases the items for measuring e-WOM on traditional WOM, adopting the items from Moliner-Velázquez, Ruiz-Molina, and Fayos-Gardó (2015).

Proposed Conceptual Model

The performance-only model of satisfaction (Yuksel & Rimmington, 1998; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Brady, Cronin, & Brand, 2002) and (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen, 1991) theory of planned behaviour (TPB) are utilised to evaluate hotel guests' e-WOM responses in this study. Previous studies have underpinned the Theory of Planned Behaviour and Performance

Model, when measuring tourists' satisfaction and revisit intention.

Within this research context, as Figure 1 shows, this study investigated the influence of hotel guests' perceived value, satisfaction and commitment on e-WOM responses, and the relationship between these variables. Specifically, perceived value is an independent variable. Satisfaction, commitment, and e-WOM responses are the dependent variables. Satisfaction and commitment are the mediating variables.

Methodology

A self-completion questionnaire was used. The general population in the present study is naturally the Chinese hotel guests (independent visitor) who had hotel experience in Malaysia. The investigators introduced the purpose of the survey and issued the Chinese version of the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of five main sections. The first section includes questions about personal demographic information (gender, age group etc). The second section is about the perceived value of the hotel guests, consisting of four dimensions with 20 items. The third part of the questionnaire use a single item (overall satisfaction) to measure the hotel guests' satisfaction level. The fourth part of questionnaire uses affective commitment with three items to measure the hotel guests' level of commitment. The last section is about e-WOM responses. It uses three measurements.

Figure 1. Research Framework
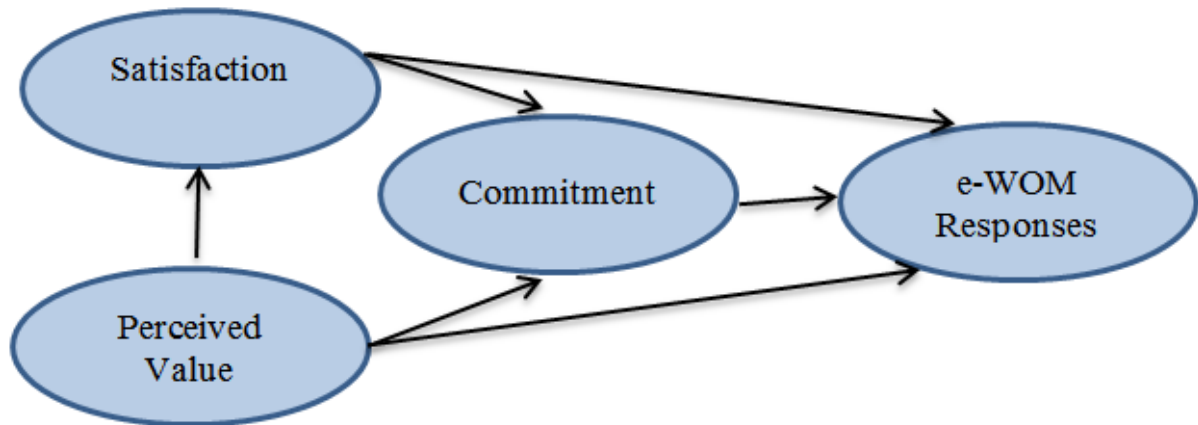
A five-point Likert measurement scale (1= strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree) was preferred. The variables are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Measurement items, scale and sources

Constructs	Measurement Items	Source
Section 2: Hotel guests' perceived value (17 items). Scale: 5-point Likert scale		
Section 2.1- Financial value (4 items)	1.Economical; 2.Reasonable price; 3.Value for money; 4. Good purchase for the price.	Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Petrick, 2004; Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010 ; Xie & Chen, 2014; Eid & El-Gohary, 2015
Section 2.2- Functional value of service quality (5 items)	1.Acceptable standard of service quality in comparison with other hotels; 2.Prompt service; 3.Reliable and accurate service; 4.Staff kindness and friendliness; 5.Consistent service quality level;	Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Petrick, 2004; Sanchez, Callarisa, Rodriguez, & Moliner, 2006; Pandža Bajs, 2015
Section 2.3- Emotional value (5 items)	1.Pleasure; 2.Feeling good; 3.Relaxation; 4.Enjoyment; 5.Comfortable.	Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Petrick, 2004; Sanchez et al., 2006; Pandža Bajs, 2015
Section 2.4- Aesthetic value (6 items)	.The furnishing of the hotel (such as tables, chairs and beds) is appealing; .The hotel architecture (the building's appearance) is impressive; .Hotel soft decoration (such as decorative paintings, curtains and ornaments) is distinctive and reasonable; .The hotel used pleasant odour scheme at various sections – e.g. room, lobby, public toilet etc.; .The colour scheme at all sections of the hotel is appealing; .The lighting at all sections of the hotel is appropriate and reasonable.	Mathwick, Malhotra, & Rigdon, 2002; Holbrook, 1999; Wu & Liang, 2009; Gallarza, Arteaga-Moreno, Del Chiappa, & Gil-Saura, 2016; Gallarza, Arteaga, Del Chiappa, Gil-Saura, & Holbrook, 2017

Section 3: Satisfaction with the Hotel Experience (1 item). Scale: 5-point Likert scale		
Section 3: Satisfaction (1 items)	1.Overall satisfaction	Alegre & Cladera, 2006; Kozak, 2002; Yu & Goulden, 2006; Heung, 2000
Section 4: Hotel guests' commitment (3 items). Scale: 5-point Likert scale		
Section 4: Commitment (3 items)	1.Emotional attachment to the hotel; 2.The strength of sense of belonging to the hotel; 3.The relationship with the hotel has personal meaning.	Shemwell, Cronin, & Bullard, 1994; Bansal, Irving & Taylor, 2004; Mattila, 2001; 2004; 2006; 2007
Section 5: Hotel guests' electronic word-of-mouth (3 items). Scale: 5-point Likert scale		
Section 5: Electronic word-of-mouth (3 items)	1.Say positive things about this hotel to other people on WeChat, QQ or Weibo; 2.Recommend this hotel to others on WeChat, QQ or Weibo; 3.Tell friends and relatives about my experiences with this hotel on WeChat, QQ or Weibo.	Moliner-Velázquez, Ruiz-Molina, & Fayos-Gardó, 2015; Augusto de Matos, Vargas Rossi, Teixeira Veiga, & Afonso Vieira, 2009; Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002

A pilot test is necessary to ensure the correctness of the study, and to avoid wasting resources and time (Lancaster, Dodd & Williamson, 2004). Moreover, this study proposes to use overall satisfaction as the single measurement of hotel guests' satisfaction. Hence, the reliability and validity analysis will not scrutinise satisfaction. Through social media, 45 questionnaires were distributed to Chinese independent visitors who had hotel experience in Malaysia. Three questionnaires were not used due to a lack of answers. Hence, a total of 42 questionnaires were used to analyse the measurements' reliability and validity.

Profile of Pilot Respondents

The respondents were 64.3 percent female and 35.7 percent male. The majority of the respondents (64.3 percent) fell within the age group 21-25. Most (76.2 percent) had a bachelor's degree as their highest education level. Around 33.3 percent of respondents' monthly income level was less than ￥ 3000, the same percent as the monthly income level of ￥5000-10000. All the respondents' purpose of travel was leisure. The majority (57.1) chose to stay at the hotel for one to three days. Three stars was the predominant standard chosen by respondents' (50.0 percent). This information is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Profile of pilot respondents (n=42)

Demographic variables	Description	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	15	35.7
	Female	27	64.3
Age Group	20 or less	4	9.5
	21-25	27	64.3
	26-30	6	14.3
	31-35	5	11.9
Highest Education Level	Less than high school	2	4.8
	High school	2	4.8
	Bachelor degree	32	76.2
	More than master degree or master degree	6	14.3
Monthly income level	Less than ¥3000	14	33.3
	¥3000-¥4999	11	26.2
	¥5000-¥10000	14	33.3
	More than ¥10000	3	7.1
Purpose of travel	Leisure	42	100.0
Hotel stay numbers	1-3 days	24	57.1
	4-5 days	14	33.3
	6 days or more than 6 days	4	9.5
Hotel stay	1 star	2	4.8
	2 star	1	2.4
	3 star	21	50.0
	4 star	13	31.0
	5 star	5	11.9

Reliability Analysis of the Instrument

Based on the data collected from the pilot study, Table 3 represents the results of the reliability performance for this questionnaire. In the results below, Cronbach's Alpha was found to be over 0.70 for each construct, thus indicating the internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaire (Pallant, 2007).

Table 3: Reliability Analysis of Pilot Study

Constructs	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Perceived Value	Financial Value (4)	0.839
	Functional Value of Service Quality (5)	0.732
	Emotional Value (5)	0.877
	Aesthetic Value (6)	0.916
Commitment	Affective Commitment (3)	0.928
E-WOM	E-WOM (3)	0.912

Factor Analysis of the Instrument

This study uses factor analysis to measure the reliability of pilot analysis. The framework proposes that perceived value, satisfaction, and commitment impact e-WOM responses. Therefore, principal component factor analysis is used, and oblique rotation is used in factor-related areas. The variables were subjected to the Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin test (KMO) to test the applicability of the factor analysis. The factor loading with a value (0.3) was considered to determine whether to delete the items in the variable (Comfrey & Lee, 2013). This information is summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: Results of Validity of Pilot Study

Measures	Item	Factor Loadings	Cumulative%	Barlett's Test	KMO's MSA
Perceived Value	Financial Value (4)	0.766-0.0.810	36.430	0.000	0.709
	Functional Value of Service Quality (5)	0.526-0.733	14.912		
	Emotional Value (5)	0.560-0.896	9.304		
	Aesthetic Value (6)	0.527-0.962	6.861		
Commitment	Affective Commitment (3)	0.906-0.955	87.489	0.000	0.737
E-WOM	E-WOM (3)	0.906-0.949	85.162	0.000	0.728

Table 4 shows the validity of the pilot study, all the item factors loading with a value greater

than 0.3, indicating that these items should be retained and accepted for further analysis (Comfrey & Lee, 2013). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measurement of all the variables exceeded 0.7, indicating good applicability and significance, and Barlett's result is 0.000 which is significant. Therefore, these statistical results indicate the goodness data of this study.

Conclusion and Future Studies

This paper evaluated the measurement scale that can be used to measure hotel visit experience, using Chinese guests as respondents. To do so, a measurement model which consists of perceived value, satisfaction and commitment on the electronic word-of-mouth responses was proposed. In order to investigate empirically, Chinese hotel guests experience in Malaysia, specifically the relationship between perceived value, satisfaction commitment and e-WOM responses were taken into consideration. Previous researchers considered some of these variables (Hu et al., 2009; Jeong & Jang, 2011; Keiningham et al., 2017). However, research covering all of these variables was lacking; hence this study to fill this gap. Therefore, to reflect the overall experience of the hotel guests, a conceptual model of predicting the e-WOM responses of Chinese hotel guests in Malaysia which combined all the variables was necessary. In this study, the performance-only model of satisfaction and the planned behaviour theory (TPB) were used to evaluate the e-WOM response of hotel guests. The independent variables in the study were perceived value, and the dependent variables were satisfaction, commitment and e-WOM responses. At the same time, commitment and satisfaction can be seen as mediating variables between perceived value and e-WOM responses, between satisfaction and e-WOM responses, and between perceived value and commitment. In order to prove the rationality of the research framework and measurements, this study used the pilot test, the results of which prove the reliability and validity of the research model. The reliability and validity of the measurements conclude that, the selected measurements are suitable to proceed for further investigation. Future researches can include some of the predictors which impact on Chinese tourists' overall satisfaction and future visit intention.

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